

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences 1 (2009) 618–622

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

World Conference on Educational Sciences 2009

Turkish university students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroom

Görsev İnceçay^{a,*}, Volkan İnceçay^b^a*Faculty of Education, English Language Department, Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey*^b*Foreign Languages Department, Maltepe University, Istanbul, Turkey*

Received October 16, 2008; revised December 22, 2008; January 5, 2009

Abstract

This study presents a case study that investigates the perceptions of 30 Turkish university students in order to better understand the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in their English as a foreign language (EFL) courses in a private university preparatory school in Istanbul, Turkey. Using multi-method, data were collected by means of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Quantitative data were supported by the qualitative data to provide more reliable results. The results suggest that, EFL countries like Turkey need to modernize and update their teaching methods which means doing changes by taking students' previous educational habits into consideration. It is obvious from the study that students in non-English speaking countries make use of communicative language teaching (CLT) if communicative activities and non-communicative activities are combined in English classrooms. In other words, aligning the communicative approach with traditional teaching structures is beneficial for EFL students.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Keywords: Turkish EFL learners; communicative and non-communicative activities; CLT; perceptions of Turkish EFL learners.

1. Introduction

Language teaching in the past focused entirely on the form dominated language teaching, instead of meaning (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979). However, mastery of grammatical forms does not necessarily mean using target language effectively in communication (Berns, 1984; Johnson 1979). As a result, Communicative Language Teaching gained importance because its major aim is to develop learners' communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

The central characteristic of CLT is that "almost everything that is done is done with communicative intent" (Larsen-Freeman cited in Rao 2002, p.81). In order to give a methodological reason for this statement it can be said that second language acquisition is an unconscious process of using language, not directly obtained by conscious learning (Krashen, 1985). Thus the major task for a teacher is to create an environment or a setting for students to acquire English by using it through activities in class. However, the main problem is how to make efficient use of the limited class time to improve students' language competence by communicating in class (Singh and Li, 2005).

* Görsev İnceçay. Tel.: +90-216-578-0000*3168

E-mail address: gorsevi@gmail.com

Widdowson (1978) claimed that an overemphasis on grammar would lead preventing the learners from developing their communicative competence. In grammar-translation classes teachers' detailed explanations and exercises of grammar might be a waste of time and in these classes there is little chance for students to communicate with language (Singh and Li, 2005). According to Littlewood (1981), many aspects of language learning can take place only through natural processes, which operate when a person is involved using the language for communication and the learners' ultimate goal is to communicate with others. Therefore, the research aims to improve students' communicative competence. In addition to all these statements, Snow (1996) reveals that students learn effectively about language when they take part actively in the communication with language rather than only passively accepting what the teacher says.

When the situation in Turkey is taken into consideration, it is consistent with the claim made by Widdowson (1979). Widdowson states that the students in developing countries who have been taught formal English for several years still have difficulties in using the language both in spoken and written forms. In China which has a similar condition to Turkey, a study was conducted by Rao (2002) to understand Chinese students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroom in a better way. In this study, the researcher used a case study approach to search and to find out the perceptions of students of communicative and non-communicative activities in the EFL classroom and the difficulties they perceived.

The results of the questionnaire showed that the students liked many of the communicative activities done in the classroom however they liked the non-communicative activities more. Items including communicative activities were based on student-to-student interaction with or without the teacher monitoring. Items about non-communicative activities emphasized formal correctness included workbook type drills and practice exercises. Among ten non-communicative activities six were liked by the more than half of the students whereas four of the nine communicative activities were favored by most students. An interesting result shows that the Chinese students started to feel independent in the classroom. Only one third of the students said that they want their teachers to explain everything to them. It appeared that nearly all of the students liked student-student interaction while only a few pupils stated that they like interacting with each other by moving around the classroom. The participating students stated some difficulties which they believe they cause unwillingness to participate in the communicative activities; lack of motivation for communicative competence, traditional learning styles and habits, EFL learning situations, lack of funding.

As a result of the study, all of the students participated in this study are aware that there is no single best way to teach. They all share the same feeling that they do need a combination of communicative and non-communicative activities. As Thompson (1996, p.36) indicated that English learning can be facilitated if teachers can develop their own locally appropriate version of the communicative approach.

2. The Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of 30 Turkish university students in order to better understand the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in their EFL courses and the difficulties that students perceived as a result of CLT in a private university preparatory school in Istanbul, Turkey. Despite the increasing interest in CLT in EFL contexts, there have not been many case studies which focus on the perceptions of students regarding CLT in the Turkish context. This paper aims to attempt to fill this gap in the literature on this important topic.

The present study aims to answer the following research questions;

1. What are the students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in the EFL classroom?
2. What are the difficulties that the students have in an EFL class where communicative activities are used?

2.1. Participants

2.1.1. Survey subjects

30 Turkish university preparatory school students participated in the study. The participating students were selected randomly in order to provide each member of the population an equal opportunity to be selected (Dane, 1990). Educational backgrounds of the students demonstrated that they are used to formal grammar teaching. The reason for choosing the participants from preparatory classes is that they are exposed to English at least 24 hours a week, whereas this exposure is substantially decreases when they go to their respective faculties. In this case, participants have 27 hours of English including grammar and four skills. A brief explanation of the terminology

used in the questionnaire was made. The questionnaire was given to students in class time so the response was 100 %. 16 of the students were female and 14 of the students were male. Their age range was between 17 and 21.

2.1.2. Interview subjects

For the interview, 5 of the students out of 30 were picked according to their English proficiency levels, and age in order to have a variety in sampling.

Table 1. Interview subjects

Subject	Gender	Age
Aslı	Female	18
Ece	Female	19
Eylül	Female	21
Cihad	Male	19
Ercan	Male	20

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire is consisted of three parts (Rao, 2002). The first part aims to gather data about participants' personal information such as name, gender, age, English proficiency and their opinions about communicative and non-communicative activities in their English classes. In the second part, 19 items were given including questions about both communicative and non-communicative techniques. In the questionnaire, items 2, 4, 7, 8, 10,11, 14, 15 and 17 represent a mix of communicative activities, whereas items 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13,16, 18 and 19 were designed as to get students' perceptions about non-communicative activities. The last part covers the potential difficulties that Turkish EFL students may have in English classes where communicative activities are used and the subjects were asked to express their points of view by choosing "Yes" or "No". To avoid any misunderstanding the questionnaire was given in students' native language (Turkish).

2.2.2. Semi-structured interview

The reason for having an interview was to get the students' perceptions about the subject and the difficulties they have experienced deeply. The researcher initiated the interview with pre-determined questions. However, there was also flexibility for follow-up questions to get additional information allowing the subjects to express their ideas, feeling and opinions in a detailed way. Each interview was held in the students' native language and the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

3. Data Analysis

Examining the data from the questionnaires' results and interview, the students' perception of CLT and NCLT activities and also the difficulties that they have experienced were identified.

4. Results

4.1. Research question 1. What are the students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in the EFL classroom?

The activities, both communicative and non-communicative, that are favoured by the participants are shown in Table 2. The results of the questionnaire clearly show that the participating students favoured both communicative and non-communicative activities. This reflects that the students are interested in studying with both communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classrooms. In other words, they cannot ignore the traditional way of learning that they have been used to in EFL classrooms throughout their previous education processes. 29 students thought that the traditional activities such as error correction (item 9) and audio-lingual drill (items 12 and 13) were effective ways of learning English. On the other hand, nearly all of the students also stated that they were in favour of communicative activities such as whole-class discussion (item 14) and group or pair work (items 4 and 8) which involved greater amounts of student-student interaction. One of the students commented on item 14 is;

In order to prove that my opinion is correct, I force myself to make sentences. So, it is helpful in learning how to make sentences in other words how to speak. (Ercan, 10 October 2008)

In addition to this, all of the participants reported that listening to a song and working on it was an interesting activity (item 2). This shows the vital importance of authentic materials during the process of learning a foreign language.

The students' answer rate to item 6 which includes teacher's explaining the grammar rules in their native language is 90 %. This result shows that as a result of the language teaching system in Turkey, the participating students are still under the pressure of learning grammar which was imposed during their earlier education. This also shows that the students were not aware of the importance of native-language avoidance strategy in learning English.

Students' obedience to the teacher is proved to be the stated belief of students in learning English since 27 of the students out of 30 reported that they would rely on their teacher to evaluate and tell them how much they learned (item 19), and also 28 of the students stated that they would like their teacher to explain each detail to them (item 18). These findings are in contradiction to the Littlewood's study in which he explains: "Asian students do not want to be spoon-fed with facts from an all knowing 'fount of knowledge'. They want to explore themselves and find their own answers." (Littlewood, 2000, p.34)

4.2. Research question 2. What are the difficulties that the students have in an EFL class where communicative activities are used?

Twenty-seven of the participants reported that they were interested in the methods their teacher used in their EFL classroom. Although twenty-seven of the students stated that they liked the communicative activities, nineteen of the students also reported that they liked non-communicative activities. As a result, in order to meet the English learning needs of the students, a combination of both communicative and non-communicative activities was thought to be the best way of teaching English. However, most of the subjects reported that they had some difficulties caused by the communicative activities used in their EFL classrooms (Table 3). Twenty-four of the students referred to grammar-based examination as the biggest obstacle to their interest in communicative activities. Even though the students are aware of the importance of communicative activities, because of having a grammar-based exam to pass their preparatory class, they reported that they lose their interest in these activities. Twenty-one of the subjects reported that their traditional learning habits and styles caused them to be passive in communicative activities. Due to the fact that, the students have a 12 year education experience before university, it is not easy for them to forget their traditional learning styles and habits which are full of teacher and book-centred approaches. The following comment was not unusual.

Since we have been educated by traditional methods, without asking the reason of anything, it is sometimes difficult to adapt to the new activities. Also, we did not have any materials except our books, so it is hard for me to get used to all of the materials and equipment used during communicative activities. (Ece, 10 October, 2008)

When the data gathered from the interview were analysed, it was seen that there were no specific differences according to the subjects' genders and ages in relation to their perceptions of activities used in EFL classrooms.

5. Conclusion

The results suggest that EFL countries like Turkey undoubtedly need to modernize and update their teaching methods. It is obvious from the study that students in non-English speaking countries can make use of CLT if communicative activities and non-communicative activities are thoroughly combined in English classrooms. In other words, aligning the communicative approach with traditional teaching methods is beneficial for EFL students and according to the results of this study it can be said that participating students are aware of this fact. In addition, information gathered from the survey and the interview used in this study shows that it is essential for the EFL teachers to develop their teaching methods "appropriate to their learners, their colleagues and their societies (Edge, 1996, p. 18). What the EFL teacher must keep in mind while working in developing countries where English is taught mostly by the help of NCLT activities is that the educational background of the students should always be taken into consideration.

Table 2. Reported favoured activities in EFL classroom

Item	No. of mentions*
<i>Communicative Items</i>	
2	30
4	28
7	25
8	27
10	24
11	24
14	29
15	23
17	15
<i>Non-Communicative Items</i>	
1	24
3	18
5	9
6	27
9	29
12	29
13	29
18	28
19	27

*The number of times the participants referred to the item in the survey.

Table 3. Reported difficulties caused by communicative activities in EFL classrooms

Difficulty	No. of mentions*
Lack of motivation	17
Passive style of learning	21
Lack of authentic reading materials	18
Lack of facilities	13
Grammar-based examination	24
Large class	17

*The number of times the participants referred to a statement as a constraint in using communicative activities.

References

- Brumfit, C.J., & Johnson, K. (1979). *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Dane, F.C. (1990). *Research methods*. Brooks / Cole publishing Company.
- Edge, J. (1996). Cross-cultural paradoxes in a profession of values. *TESOL Quarterly* 30, 9-30.
- Green, J. M. (1993). Student Attitudes Toward Communicative and Non-Communicative Activities: Do enjoyment and Effectiveness go together? *The Modern Language Journal* 7).
- Krashen, S. (1988). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. London: Longman.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (1986). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press: New York.
- Littlewood, W. (1981). *Communicative Language Teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Littlewood, W. (2000). Do Asian students really want to listen and obey? *ELT Journal* 54/1, 31-35.
- Rao, Z. (2002). Chinese Students' perceptions of Communicative and Non-communicative activities in EFL Classroom. *System*, 30, 85-105.
- Richards, J.C., & Rodgers, T. (1986). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A Description and Analysis*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Singh, M., & Li, L. (2005). Communicative Language Teaching in China: Misconceptions, Applications and Perceptions. *Australian Association for research in education*.
- Thompson, G. (1996). Some Misconceptions about Communicative Language Teaching. *ELT Journal*, 50/1 9-15.
- Widdowson, H.G. (1978). *Teaching Language as Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Widdowson, H.G. (1979). The Teaching of English as Communication. In C.J. Brumfit & K. Johnson (Eds.), *The communicative approach to language teaching* (pp.103-117). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.